

# *Bruno Paul John*

**1874-1953**

The ingenuity, diligence and devotion to a single ideal that of furniture manufacturing, established Bruno Paul John as a leading national figure in the manufacture of quality furniture. His adventure of over sixty years of continuous activity and responsibility in the furniture-manufacturing field stands as a landmark for activity in this industry.

Born in Strechenbach, Germany, June 7, 1874, B.P. John was the son of the village flour miller. The family immigrated to the United States in 1880 where Bruno P. John attended public school at Manistique, Michigan and Tacoma, Washington.

It was when B.P. John was about 15 years old that his family moved to Chehalis, Washington where John was given a job by F.S. Doernbecher with the Ludinghouse Sash and Door Company. Those working with B.P. John soon realized Mr. John's genius with machinery and his ability to convert old worm out equipment into better machinery than when new. Sixteen to eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, was the working schedule of this young man with wages that averaged less than \$1 a day.

From 1893 until 1927, Mr. John remained associated with the Doernbecher Manufacturing Company, first in Chehalis and after 1900 in Portland. He rose very rapidly in this company and was successively a machinist, foreman, general superintendent and vice president. In 1927, Mr. John sold his accumulated interest in the Doernbecher Company for a reported \$1,250,000.

In the fall of 1928, Mr. John acquired the extensive properties of the Carmen Furniture Manufacturing Company and a year later, the adjoining plant of Heywood-Wakefield Company, both located on the Willamette River in Portland. By the fall of 1929, he had established a new institution, the B.P. John Furniture Corporation. Business totaling in excess of a million dollars for the first 12 months was the remarkable record established by the corporation at a time when the market offered little encouragement for new furniture enterprise. Mr. John's success is attributed to his sense for a definite need and an inviting market, a market for "Style at a Price." The favorable response and endorsement by more than 1,000 progressive retail dealers and their estimated 5,000 retail salesmen is definite recognition of the soundness of Mr. John's instinct.

At the B.P. John Furniture plant in Portland, Mr. John built his organization into one that employed 750 skilled craftsmen, including the Oakland, California upholstering plant. Mr. John's respect and admiration for his work force was often voiced as follows: "No one man is entirely responsible for the success of the institution." Collectively Mr. John estimated his great corps of workers as second to none in the furniture manufacturing industry.

The B.P. John furniture manufacturing plant was nearly a self-contained unit. It consisted of two sawmills, one a band mill and the other a Swedish gang. The mills cut mostly alder and maple, the local hardwoods. The lumber was air dried and then put in the kilns

for the final drying. Also, there was a veneer peeler and dryer, equipment necessary for the basic start in furniture manufacturing.

Thousands of pieces of equipment including glue-up machines, rip, trim, cut off, band and dado saws, planers and molders initiated the furniture manufacturing process. After the pieces were cut to size, there was an assembly and finishing process followed by inspection and packing for merchandising. A separate department constructed containers from large sheets of cardboard. The cartons were cut, notched and printed. This department was just one of many that were necessary in the business. A complete excelsior plant furnished the excelsior and pads for packing. Excess excelsior was baled and sold to other manufacturers. Glass came to the Portland plant by rail, some of it manufactured in the United States and some imported from Belgium. The plates were cut to size in oval, round or square shapes and either seamed or beveled. The glass was cleaned, imperfections were removed and then the mirrors were silvered and sent on to be packed with the manufactured furniture. Upholstering was also accomplished at the B.P. John plant, this being another complete operation. Rolls of material came back in by truck or rail to the Portland facility and the finished product was then shipped. Additionally, the extensive operations of the B.P. John factory included an electric shop where motors were re-wired, a complete sheet metal and machine shop with lathes and blacksmith shop.

It was Mr. John's dedication to build quality furniture that resulted in his establishing his own furniture manufacturing facilities. Rather than competing with the establishment with which he was previously associated, Mr. John chose to manufacture a high quality line of furniture by his former firm. Again, Mr.

John's decision was a sound one. It is the famous "Fashion Flow" design that proved so popular for Mr. B.P. John and which so many remember today as a quality line of furniture. The multi-million dollar plant funded by Mr. John was purchased in 1953 by two long-time Tacoma furniture-making executives, Mr. C.H. Nyssen and Mr. R.C. Bourbon who reorganized the Portland firm but retained Mr. John as Chairman of the Board in recognition of his long association with the business that he founded.

Mr. John married the former Helen Kronenberg of Portland on February 28, 1911. Two children were born to the John's: a son, Lester M. John, Portland, and a daughter, Mrs. Imelda John Condon, also of Portland.

In addition to his manufacturing interest, Mr. B.P. John was a member of the Republican Party, the Oregon Manufacturer's Association, the Portland Chamber of Commerce and the Roman Catholic Church. He was also on the board of Catholic Charities.